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FOR PM AND EUR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2029
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: U.S.-BULGARIA SECURITY DIALOGUE TO BE REVAMPED

REF: STATE 112900

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan Sutton for reasons 1.4 (b)/(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The United States has maintained only an informal and irregular bilateral security dialogue with Bulgaria since its entrance into NATO in 2004. The two sides have held "joint staff talks" and "security policy talks" (sometimes referred to as "OSD talks") on separate tracks and at varying intervals. In principle, these talks are to be held every year, though in practice this has not been the case. Earlier this year, the Embassy proposed to the Department of Defense to combine the staff talks and policy talks into a single forum and to regularize the frequency and level of the meetings. Defense Minister Mladenov voiced his support for this approach during his October 29 visit to Washington. DOD has agreed and we expect the first meeting in the new combined format to take place in Washington in December or January. We believe these changes will be a significant improvement to the process. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) DASD Robert Newberry visited Sofia in February 2008 for the last security policy talks with the Ministry of Defense. Brigadier General Mark Ramsay visited in April 2008 for the last joint staff talks with the Bulgarian General Staff. Both sets of talks have been in place since Bulgaria's entrance to NATO, but the structure, date and level of talks have been worked out on an ad hoc basis each time and are not stipulated by any binding agreement.

13. (C) The Bulgarian government places high importance on this consultative mechanism and views it as a primary forum for bilateral coordination on defense priorities, such as overseas deployments, defense modernization, NATO issues, missile defense and joint basing. Bulgaria has always participated in these events at the Deputy Minister and four-star general level, and has privately expressed disappointment that the U.S. interlocutors were generally much lower level and often not at all familiar with Bulgaria or the relevant regional issues.

14. (C) Both the Embassy and host government officials are aware that the dialogue has not been effective to date. The bifurcated nature of the talks at times created more problems than they solved and the uncertainty over timing resulted in both sides having insufficient time to prepare. Too often the discussions delved too far into the weeds of a particular operational issue or the sessions became informational briefs for visitors completely unfamiliar with the relationship. After discussions with the Bulgarians, the Embassy proposed earlier this year to the Department of Defense to combine the two sets of talks into a single annual event and DOD has agreed. The Bulgarians intend to continue to participate at the Deputy Minister level and understand that we likely cannot reciprocate, but they hope that our side will be represented at the Assistant Secretary or DAS level.

15. (C) From post's perspective, it is essential that a

rough annual timeline for the talks is maintained so that both sides can anticipate and prepare for the event in advance. The agenda for discussions should be set far in advance and kept at strategic level. Bulgaria has proven itself to be a steadfast ally in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Bosnia, but is almost completely off the radar screen of senior defense visitors. (To our knowledge no Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense has ever visited in an official capacity; and Under Secretary level visits on defense and security issues since 2000 have been exceedingly rare.) In this context, the existence of an effective mechanism for regular, high-level talks is particularly important to ensure that we are able to fully align our priorities and get the most out of an ally that looks to us for leadership and is eager to assist us in our regional security priorities.

SUTTON